

EURIPIDES **MEDEA**



Translated by Robinson Jeffers
Designed by **DENİZ ERTAN ERTEM**

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Medea

Euripides Greece

translated by Robinson Jeffers

CHARACTERS

THE NURSE	CREON (kre'on)
THE TUTOR	JASON
THE CHORUS	AEGEUS
FIRST WOMAN OF CORINTH	THE TWO SONS OF JASON AND MEDEA
SECOND WOMAN OF CORINTH	JASON'S SLAVE
THIRD WOMAN OF CORINTH	ATTENDANTS TO MEDEA
MEDEA (midea)	SOLDIERS

The entire action of the play occurs before MEDEA's house in Corinth.

Act One

The NURSE comes from the doorsteps toward the front of the stage.

THE NURSE: I wish the long ship *Argo* had never passed that
perilous channel between the Symplegades,
I wish the pines that made her mast and her oars still waved in
the wind on Mount Pelion, and the gray fishhawk
Still hested in them, the great adventurers had never voyaged
Into the Asian sunrise to the shores of morning for the Golden
Fleece.

For then my mistress Medea
Would never have seen Jason nor loved and saved him, nor cut
herself off from home to come with him



Into this country of the smiling chattering Greeks and the roofs of
Corinth:' over which I see evil
Hang litre a cloud. For she is not meek but fierce, and the
daughter of a king.

Yet at first all went well.

The folk of Corinth were kind to her, they were proud of her
beauty, and Jason loved her. Happy is the house
Where the man and the woman love and are faithful.

Now all is
changed; all is black hatred. For Jason
Has turned from her; he calls the old bond a barbarian mating,
not a Greek marriage; he has cast her off
And wedded the yellow-haired child of Creon, the ruler bere. He
wants worldly advantage, fine friends,
And a high place in Corinth. For these he is willing to cast Medea
like a harlot, and betray the children
That she has borne him. He is not wise, I think.

But Medea

Lies in the house, broken with pain and rage; she will neither eat
nor drink, except her own tears;
She turns her face toward the earth, remembering her father's
house and her native land, which she abandoned
For the love of this man: who now despises her.
And if I try to speak comfort to her she only stares at me, great
eyes like stones. She is like a stone on the shore
Or a wave of the sea, and I think she hates
Even her children. She is learning what it is to be a foreigner,
cast out, alone, and despised.
She will never learn to be humble; she will never learn to drink
insult
Like harmless water. O I'm in terror of her: whether she'll thread
a knife through her own heart,
Or whether she'll hunt the bridegroom and his new bride, or what
more dreadful evil stalks in the forest
Of her dark mind. I know that Jason would have been wiser to
tempt a lioness, or naked-handed
Steal the whelps of a tiger.

(*She sees* MEDEA's SONS *coming with their* TUTOR.)-

Here come the happy children. Little

they know

Of their mother's grief.

THE TUTOR: (*entering with the two little* BOYS). Old servant of
my

lady, why do you stand out bere, keeping watch in solitude
With those grim eyes? Is it _silme trouble of your own that you are
lamenting? I should think Medea
Would need your care.

1. *I wish . . . the roofs of Corinth.*

Jason met Medea while seeking the legendary Golden Fleece, a closely guarded treasure of Medea's father, King Aetes (15 't6z) of Colchis (korkis). While journeying east to Colchis and the "shores of morning" on his ship the Argo, Jason and his companions faced many dangers, among them the Clashing Rocks, or Symplegades (sim pleg'e-d'af), which roll continuously against one another and threaten to crush whatever comes between them. When "the great adventurers" finally arrived at Colchis, a barbarian country on the Black Sea, Aetes set Jason an impossible series of tasks as the price of winning the Golden Fleece. The goddesses Hera and Aphrodite sent down Cupid to inflame Medea with love for Jason; as a result, Medea used magic to help Jason win the • Fleece and then fled with him, ending up eventually in the Greek city of Corinth.

THE NURSE: It is all one to Medea, whether I am there or here.

Yes, it is mine.

My trouble. My lady's grief is my grief. And it has hurt me
So that I had to come mit and speak it to the earth and sky.

THE TUTOR: Is she
still in that deep despair?

THE NURSE: You are lucky,
Old watchdog of Jason's boys. I envy you,
You do not see her. This evil is not declining, it is just at dawn. I
dread the lion-eyed

Glare of its noon.

THE TUTOR: Is she so wrought? Yet neither you nor Medea
Knows the latest and worst.

THE NURSE: What? What?

THE TUTOR: I shouldn't have
spoken.

No, it is nothing.

THE NURSE: Tell me the truth, old man. You and I are two
slaves, we can trust each other.

We can keep secrets.

THE TUTOR: I heard them saying—when we walked
beside the holy fountain Peirene,²

Where the old men sit in the sun on the stone benches—they
were saying that Creon, the lord of this land,

Intends to drive out Medea and the children with her, these
innocent boys, out of this house

And out of Corinth, and they must wander through the wild world
Homeless and helpless.

THE NURSE: I don't believe it. Ah, no! Jason may hate
the mother, but he would hardly
Let his sons be cast out.

THE TUTOR: Well . . . he has made a new alliance. He
is not a friend of this house.

THE NURSE: If this were true!—Listen: I hear her voice. Take the
children away, keep them away from her.

Take them to the other door. Quickly.

*(They go out, toward a rear door of the house. The NURSE
looks*

after them. wringing her hands.)

MEDEA: *(within the house. She is Asiatic and laments loudly).*³

Death. Death is my wish. For myself, my enemies, my
children. Destruction.

That's the word. Grind, crush. burn. Destruction. Ai . . . Ai . . .

THE NURSE: *(wringing her hands).* This is my terror:

To hear her always harking back to the-children, like a fierce:
hound at fault. O unhappy one,
They're not to blame.

3. Peirene (pi ren').

2. She is Asiatic and laments loudly. The Greeks prided themselves on their rational, civilized behavior, which generally included avoiding excessive shows of emotion.

MEDEA: (*within*). If any god hears me: let me die. Ah, rotten,
rotten, rotten: death is the only
Water to wash this dirt.

(*CHORUS is coming in, but the NURSE does not yet notice them.*

She is intent on MEDEA's cries and her own thoughts.)

THE NURSE: Oh, it's a bad thing
To be born of high race, and brought up willful and powerful in a
great house, unruled
And ruling many: for then if misfortune comes it is unendurable;
it drives you mad. I say that poor people
Are happier: the little commoners and humble people, the poor in
spirit: they can lie low
Under the wind and live: while the tall oaks and cloud-raking
mountain pines go mad in the storm,
Writhe, groan, and crash. This is the wild and terrible justice of
God: it brings on great persons
The great disasters.

(*She becomes aware of the WOMEN OF THE CHORUS who have*

come in, and is startled from her reverie.)

What do you want?

FIRST WOMAN: I hear her crying again: it
is dreadful.

SECOND WOMAN: Her lamentation.

She is beautiful and deep in grief: we couldn't help coming.

THIRD WOMAN: We are friends of this house and its trouble hurts
us

THE NURSE: You are right, friends; it is not a home. It is broken. A
house of grief and of weeping.

MEDEA: (*within*). Hear me, God, let me die.

What I need: all dead, all dead, all dead,
Under the great cold stones. For a year and a thousand years and
another thousand: cold as the stones, cold,
But noble again, proud, straight, and silent. crimson-cloaked
In the blood of our wounds.

FIRST WOMAN: O shining sky, divine earth.

Harken: not to the song that this woman sings.
It is not her mind's music; her mind is not kere.
She does not know what she prays for.
Pain and wrath are the singers.

SECOND WOMAN: Unhappy one,
Never pray for death, never pray for death,
He is bere all too soon.
He strikes from the clear sky like a hawk,
He hides behind green leaves, or he waits
Around the corner of the wall.
O never pray for death, never pray for death—

Because that prayer will be answered.

MEDEA (*the rise and fall of her voice indicate that she is prowling back and forth beyond the doorway, like a caged animal*). I know poisons. I know the bright teeth of steel. I know fire. But I will not be mocked by my enemies,

And I will not endure pity. Pity and contempt are sister and brother, twin-born. I will not die tamely.

I will not allow blubber-eyed pity, nor contempt either, to snivel over the stones of my tomb.

I am not a Greek woman.

THIRD WOMAN. No, a barbarian woman from savage

Colchis, at the bitter end

Of the Black Sea. Does she boast of that?

SECOND WOMAN. She doesn't know what she is saying.

MEDEA: (*in the house*). Poisons. Death-magic. The sharp sword. The hemp rope. Death-magic. Death . . .

SECOND WOMAN. I hate Jason, who made this sorrow.

FIRST WOMAN (*to the NURSE*). Old and honored servant of a great house, do you think it is wise

To leave your lady alone in there, except perhaps a few slaves, building that terrible acropolis

Of deadly thoughts? We Greeks believe that solitude is very dangerous, great passions grow into monsters,...

In the dark of the mind; but if you share them with loving friends they remain human, they can be endured.

I think you ought to persuade Medea to come from the dark dwelling and speak with us, before her heart breaks,

Or she does harm to herself. She has lived among us, we've learned to love her, we'd gladly tell her so.

It might comfort her spirit.

THE NURSE. Do you think so? She wouldn't listen.

—Oh, oh, she is coming!

Speak carefully to her; make your words a soft music.

(*MEDEA comes through the doorway, propping herself against one of the pillars, and stands staring.*)

THE NURSE. Oh, my dear, my poor child. (*She hurries toward MEDEA.*)

SECOND WOMAN: (*whispering*). They say she is dangerous. Look at her eyes.

FIRST WOMAN: She is a witch, but not evil. She can make old men young again: she did it for Jason's father.⁴

THIRD WOMAN: All the people of her country are witches. They know about drugs and magic. They are savages, but they have a wild wisdom

4. *She is a witch . . . Jason's tather*. Medea was, in fact, a sorceress or witch, and had once prepared, at Jason's request, a special potion that made his tather forty years younger.

SECOND WOMAN: Poor soul, it hasn't helped this one much.

MEDEA: (*she does not see the gaping and whispering women*). I

will look at the light of the sun, this last time. I wish from that
blue sky the white wolf of lightning

Would leap, and burst my skull and my brain, and like a burning
babe cling to these breasts. . . .

(*She checks and looks fiercely at the WOMEN*

below.) Someone is here?

(*Her hostile eyes range back and forth; she sees the WOMEN*

clearly now, and assumes full self-control. Her voice is cautious

and insincere.) I did not know I had visitors. . . . Women of
Corinth,

If anything has been spoken too loudly here, consider

That I believed I was alone; and I have some provocation.

You've come—let me suppose

With love and sympathy—to peer at my sorrow. I understand
well enough

That nothing is ever private in a Greek city; whoever. withholds
anything

Is thought sullen or proud.

(*With irony*) undemocratic

I think you call it. This is not always just, but we know that
justice, at least on earth,

Is a name, not a fact; and as for me, I wish to avoid any appearance

Of being. . . proud. Of what? Of affliction? I will show you my
naked heart. You know that my lord Jason

Has left me and made a second marriage, with the bright-haired
child

Of wealth and- power. I too was a child of power, but not in this
country; and I spent my power

For love of Jason. I poured it out before him like water; I made
him drink it like wine. I gave him

Success and fame; I saved him his precious life, not once, many
times. You may have heard what I did for him:

I betrayed my father for him, I killed my brother to save him; I
made my own land to hate me forever;

And I fled west with Jason in the Greek ship, under the thunder
of the sail, weeping and laughing,

That huge journey through the Black Sea and the Bosphorus,

where the rocks clang together, through the Sea of Marmora,

And through the Hellespont, watched by the spearmen of wealthy

Troy, and home to Greek water:⁵ his home, my exile,

My endless exile. And here I have loved him and borne him sons;
and this . . . man . . .

Has left me and taken Creon's daughter, to enjoy her fortune, and
put aside her soft yellow hair

5. *1 betrayed my father. . . . to Greek water.* Medea not only gave Jason magical charms and potions to help him accomplish the near-impossible tasks Aetides had demanded he perform in return for the Golden Fleece; she also took her younger brother along on the Argo's flight from Colchis and had him killed as a way of delaying Aeetes' pursuit of her and Jason. The journey to Greece took Jason and Medea southwest through the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmora to the Aegean Sea; the Bosphorus (bos'par es) and the Hellespont (hel'i spont) are straits connecting Marmora with the Black Sea and the Aegean, respectively. The "wealthy" city of Troy, later destroyed in the Trojan War, was near the banks of the Hellespont (now called the Dardanelles).

And kiss her young mouth.

(MEDEA *stands rigid, struggling for self-control.*)

FIRST WOMAN: She is terrible. Stone with stone eyes.

SECOND WOMAN: Look: the foam-flake on her lip, that flickers with her breathing.

THIRD WOMAN: She is pitiable: she is under great injuries.

MEDEA: (*low-voiced*). I do not know what other women . . . I do not know how much a Greek woman

Will endure. The people of my race are somewhat rash and intemperate. As for me, I want simply to die.

But Jason is not to smile at his bride over my grave, nor that great man Creon

Hang wreaths and make a feast day in Corinth. Or let the wreaths be bright blinding fire, and the songs a high wailing, And the wine, blood.

FIRST WOMAN: Daughter of sorrow, beware.

It is dangerous to dream of wine; it is worse

To speak of wailing or blood:

For the images that the mind makes

Find a way out, they work into life.

MEDEA: Let them work into life!

FIRST WOMAN: There are evils that cannot be cured by evil.

Patience remains, and the gods watch all.

MEDEA: (*dully, without hope*). Let them watch my enemies go down in blood.

SECOND WOMAN: Medea, beware!

Some great person is coming.—It is Creon himself!

THIRD WOMAN: Creon is coming.

THE NURSE: He is dark with anger. O my lady . . . my child . . . bend in this wind,

And not be broken!

(CREON *comes in, with MEN attending Isim. The WOMEN OF THE CHORUS move to one side. He speaks to MEDEA, with an angry gesture toward CHORUS.*)

CREON: You have admirers, I see. Abate your pride: these people will not be with you where you are going.

(*A pause. MEDEA does not answer. CREON brings his wrath under control.*)

Medea, woman of the stone forehead and hate-filled eyes: I have made my decision. I have decided

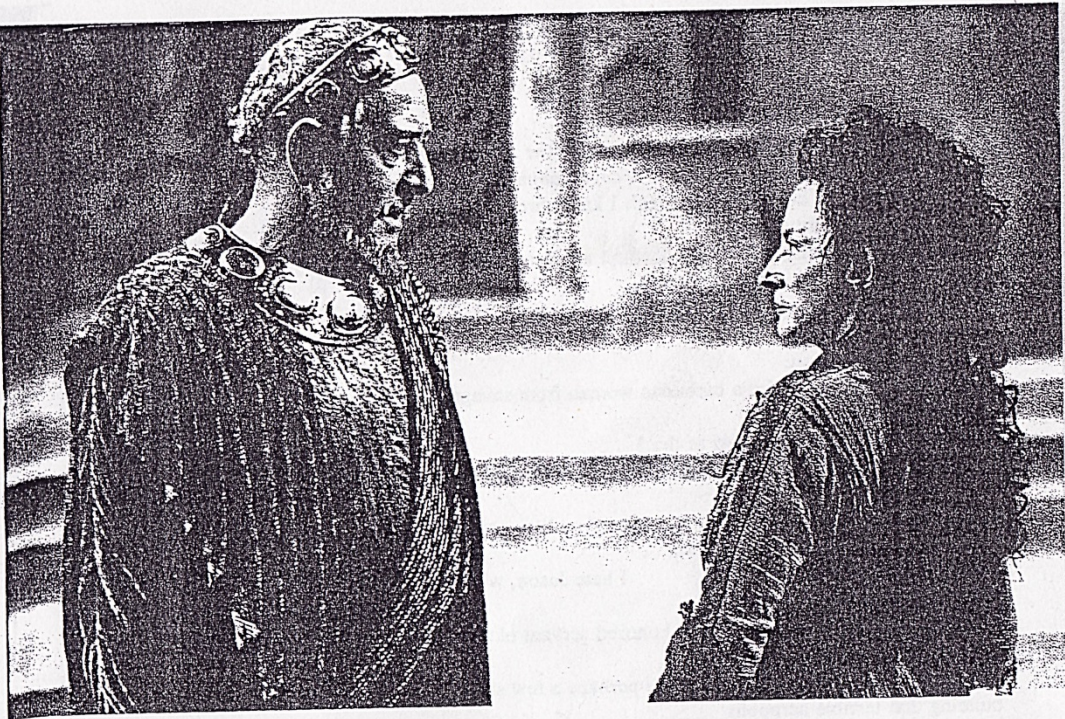
That you must leave this land at once and go into banishment.

you with your children. I intend to remove

A root of disturbance out of the soil of Corinth. I am here to see to it. I will not return home

Until it is done.

MEDEA: You mean . . . banishment?



CREON.

go where you may. Medea. but here
You abide no more.

Exile: banishment:

MEDEA.

I with my children?

CREON.

away from you.

MEDEA.

Because we have suffered I will not take them
evil

We are to suffer more evil. Death was my wish.

CREON.

Ha? Words.

You'll not be hindered: you can have death
While there are ropes to hang hy or waves to drown in., Only
make haste
And leave this land.

MEDEA.

The children, my lord . . .

(Her lips move cingrily, but the voice is not heard.)

CREON.

What are you

muttering?

MEDEA. Nothing . . . I am praying ta my gods for wisdom.

And you for mercy. My sons are stili very young, tender and
helpless. You know, my lord.
What exile means—to wander with fear and famine for guide and
driver. through all the wild winter storms
And the rage of the sun: and beg a bread crust and be derided:
pelted with stones in the villages.

Held a little lower than the scavenger dogs, kicked, scorned, and
slaved—the children, my lord,

Are Jason's children..Your chosen friend, I believe, and now
Even closer bound. And as for me, your servant, O
master of Corinth, what have I done? Why
Must I be cast?

CREON: I will tell you frankly: because you nourish
rancorous ill will toward persons

Whom I intend to protect: I send you out before you've time to
do harm here. And you are notorious

For occult knowledge: sorcery, poisons, magic. Men say you
can even sing down the moon from heaven,

And make the holy stars to falter and run backward, against the
purpose

And current of nature. Ha? As to that I know not: I know you are
dangerous. You threaten my daughter: you have to go.

MEDEA: But I wish her well, my lord! I wish her all happiness. I
hope that Jason may be as kind to her
As . . . to me.

CREON: (*fiercely*). That is your wish?

MEDEA: I misspoke. I thought of . . .
old days. . . .

(*She seems to weep.*)

CREON: I acknowledge, Medea,

That you have some cause for grief. I all the more must guard
against your dark wisdom and bitter heart.

MEDEA: You misjudge me cruelly. It is true that I have some
knowledge of drugs and medicines: I can sometimes cure
sickness:

Is that a crime? These dark rumors, my lord,

Are only the noise of popular gratitude you must have observed
it often: if any person

Knows a little more than the common man, the people suspect
him. If he brings a new talent,

How promptly the hateful whispers begin. But you are not a
common man, lord of Corinth, you

Will not fear knowledge.

CREON: No. Nor change my decision. I am here
to see you leave this house and the city:

And not much time. Move quickly, gather your things and go. I
pity you, Medea,
But you must go.

MEDEA. You pity me? You . . . pity me?

(*She comes close to him, wild with rage.*)

I will endure a dog's pity or a wart-grown toad's. May God who
hears me . . . We shall see in the end

Who's to be pitied.

CREON: (*shocked, recovering his dignity*). This is good. This is what I desire. Unmask the livid face of your hatred

And I see whom I deal with. Serpent and wolf: a wolf from Asia:

I'd rather have you rage now

Than do harm later. Now, Medea: out of here.

Before my men drive you out.

MEDEA: (*controls her fury, then speaks*). You see a woman driven half mad with sorrow, laboring to save

Her little children. No wolf, my lord. And though I was born in

far-off Asia: call that misfortune,

Not vice. The races of Asia are human too,

As the bright Greeks are. And our hearts are as brittle: if you hurt us

we cry. And we have children and love them,

As Greeks do. You have a daughter, sir—

CREON. Yes, and I'll keep her safe of your female hatred: therefore I send you

Out of this land.

MEDEA: It is not true, I am not jealous. I never hated her. Jealous for the sake of Jason? I am far past wanting Jason, my lord. You took him and gave him to her,

And I will say you did well, perhaps wisely. Your daughter is loved by all: she is beautiful: if I were near her

I should soon love her.

CREON. You can speak sweetly enough, you can make honey in your mouth like a brown bee

When it serves your turn.

MEDEA: Not honey: the truth.

CREON: Trust you or not, you are going out of this bountry, Medea.

What I decide is fixed; it is like the firm rocks of Acrocorinth,⁶ which neither earthquake can move

Nor a flood of tears melt. Make ready quickly: I have a guest in my house. I should return to him.

THE NURSE: (*comes beside MEDEA and speaks to her*).

What guest?

O my lady, ask him

Who is the guest? If powerful and friendly

He might be a refuge to us in bitter exile. . . .

MEDEA: (*pays no attention to her. Kneels to CREON*). I know that your will is granite. But even on the harsh face of a granite mountain some flowers of mercy

May grow in season. Have mercy on my little sons, Creon,

Though there is none for me.

(*She reaches to embrace his knees. He steps backward from her.*)

CREON: How long, woman? This is decided; done; finished.

6. Acrocorinth (from the Greek *akros*, meaning "top" or "peak." + *Corinth*), a high rock on which was built a citadel and a temple of Aphrodite.

MEDEA: (*rising from her knees, turns half away from him*). I am
not a beggar.

I will not trouble you. I shall not live long.

(*She turns to him again.*)

Sire: grant me a few hours yet, one day to prepare in, one little
day

Before I go olit. of Corinth forever.

CREON:

What? No! I told you. The day

is today, Medea, this day.

And the hour is now.

MEDEA:

There are no flowers on this mountain: not one
violet, not one anemone.

Your face, my lord, is like flint. If I could find the right words, if
some god would lend me a touch of eloquence

I'd show you my heart. I'd lift it out of my breast and turn it over
in my hands; you'd see how pure it is

Of any harm or malice toward you or your household.

(*She holds out her hands to him.*)

Look at it:

not a speck: look, my lord. They call mercy

The jewel of kings. I am praying

To you as to one of the gods: destroy us not utterly. To go out
with no refuge, nothing prepared,

Is plain death: I would rather kill myself quickly and here. If I
had time but to ask the slaves

And strolling beggars where to go, how to live: and I must gather
some means: one or two jewels

And small gold things I have, to trade them for bread and goat's
milk. Wretched, wretched, wretched I am,

I and my boys.

(*She kneels again.*)

I beseech you, Creon,

By the soft yellow hair and cool smooth forehead and the white
knees

Of that youne girl who is now Jason's bride: lend me this inch of
time: one day—half a day.

For this one is now half gone—and I will go my sad course and
vanish the morning quietly as dew

.That drops on the stones at dawn and is dry at sunrise. You will
never again be troubled by any word

Or act of mine. And this I pray you for your dear child's sake. O
Creon, what is half a day

In all the rich years of Corinth?

CREON:

I will think of it. I am no tyrant

I have been merciful to my own hurt. many times. Even to myself

I seem to be foolish

If I grant you this thing. . . . No, Medea,

I will not grant it.

(She has been kneeling with bowed head. Silently she raises her imploring face toward him.)

Well . . . We shall watch you: as a hawk does a viper. What harm could she do

In the tail of one day? A ruler ought to be ruthless, but I am not.

I am a fool

In my own eyes, whatever the world may think. I can be gruff with warriors; a woman weeping

Floods me off course.—Take it, then. Make your preparations.

But if tomorrow's sun shines on you here—Medea, you die. . .

Enough words. Thank me not. I want my hands

Washed of this business.

(He departs quickly, followed by his MEN. MEDEA rises from her knees.)

MEDEA. I will thank you.

And the whole world will hear of it.

FIRST WOMAN. I have seen this man's. arrogance, watched and heard him.

I am of Corinth. and I say that Corinth

Is not well ruled.

SECOND WOMAN: The city where even a woman, even a foreigner, Suffers unjustly the rods of power

Is not well ruled.

FIRST WOMAN: Unhappy Medea, what haven, what sanctuary, where will you wander?

Which of the gods. Medea,

Drives you through waves of woe the mooring broken, the hawsers and the anchor-head,

Hopeless from harbor?

MEDEA. . . . This man . . . this barking dog . . . this gulled fool . . . gods of my father's country.

You saw me low on my knees before the great dog of Corinth;

Humble, holding my heart in my hands

For a dog to bite—break this dog's teeth!

Women: it is a bitter

thing to be a woman.

A woman is weak for warfare, she must use cunning. Men boast their battles: I tell you this. and we know it:

It is easier to stand in battle three times. in the front line. in the stabbing fury, than to bear one child.

And a woman, they say, can do no good but in childbirth. It may be so. She can do evil, she can do evil.

I wept before that tall dog. I wept my tears before him. I

degraded my knees to him, I aulled and flattered him:

O triple fool, he has giyen me all that I needed: a little time,

space of time. Death is dearer to me
 Than what I am now; and if today by sunset the world has not
 turned and turned sharp too—let your dog Creon
 Send two or three slaves to kill me and a cord to strangle me: I
 will stretch out
 My throat to it. But I have a bitter hope, women. I begin to see
 l i g h t
 Through the dark wood, between the monstrous trunks of the
 trees, at the end of the tangled forest an eyehole,
 A pinpoint of light: I shall not die perhaps
 As a pigeon dies. Nor like an innocent lamb, that feels a hand on
 its head and looks up from the knife
 To the man's face and dies. No, like some yellow-eyed beast that
 has killed its hunters let me lie down
 On the hounds' bodies and the broken spears.—Then how to
 strike them? What means to use? There are so many
 Doors through which painful death may glide in and catch . . .
 which one, which one?

(She stands meditating. The NURSE comes from behind her and

speaks to the FIRST WOMAN OF THE CHORUS.)

THE NURSE: Tell me: do you know what guest

Is in Creon's house?

FIRST WOMAN: What?—Oh. An Athenian ship came from
 the north last night: it is Aegeus.⁷

The lord of Athens.

THE NURSE: Aegeus! My lady knows him: I believe he will
 help us. Some god has brought him here,
 Some savior god.

FIRST WOMAN: He is leaving, I think, today.

THE NURSE: *(hobbling back toward MEDEA.)* My lady! Lord
 Aegeus

Is here in Corinth, Creon's guest. Aegeus of Athens.

(MEDEA looks at her silently, without attention.)

If you will

see him and speak him fairly,
 We have a refuge.

MEDEA: I have things in my hand to do. Be quiet.

THE NURSE: Oh.
 listen to me!

You are driven out of Corinth; you must find shelter. Aegeus of
 Athens is here.

*(MEDEA turns from her and moves to reenter the house.
 The*

*NURSE catches at her clothing, servile but eager, slave
 and
 mother at the same time.)*

MEDEA: *(angrily turning on her.)* What's that to me?

THE NURSE: I lifted you in my arms when you were . . . this long.

7. Aegeus, a legendary Athenian king and the father of Theseus.

I gave you milk from these breasts, that are now dead leaves. I
saw the little beautiful body straighten and grow tall: Oh . . . child .
. almost my child . . . how can I
Not try to save you? Life is better than death—

MEDEA:

Not now.

THE NURSE:

Time's

running out!

MEDEA:

I have time. Oh, I have time.

It would be good to sit here a thousand years and" think of nothing
But the deaths of three persons.

THE NURSE:

Ai! There's no hope then.

Ai, child, if you could do this red thing you dream of, all Corinth
Would pour against you.

MEDEA:

After my enemies are punished and I

have heard the last broken moan—Corinth?

What's that? I'll sleep well. I am alone against all, and so weary
That is pitiful

*(The NURSE stands wringing her hands. MEDEA goes slowly up
to the door of the house. Some of the CORINTHIAN WOMEN are
watching her; others gaze into the distance.)*

FIRST WOMAN: Look: who is coming? I see the sunlight glitter on
lanceheads.

SECOND WOMAN: Oh, it is Jason!

THIRD WOMAN: Jason! Medea's worst enemy, who should have
been

Her dearest protector.

*(MEDEA leans wearily against one of the pillars of the doorway, her
back to the stage, unconscious of what they are saying. JASON enters
in haste, followed by armed attendants, and speaks angrily.)*

JASON:

What business have you here, you women

Clustered like buzzing bees at the hive-door?

Where is Medea?

*(They do not answer for a moment, but look involuntarily toward
MEDEA, and JASON sees her. She jerks and stiffens at the sound
of his voice, but does not turn.)*

FIRST WOMAN: *(pointing).* There mourning for what you have
done.

JASON: Ha? What she has done.

Not I. Not by my will she and my sons are exiled.

*(MEDEA slowly turns and faces him, her head high, rigid with
inner violence.)*

MEDEA: Is there another dog here?

JASON:

So, Medea,

You have once more affronted and insulted the head of Corinth.

This is not the first time

I've seen what a fool anger is. You might have lived here happily,

secure and honored—I hoped you would-
 By being just a little decently respectful toward those in power.
 Instead, you had to go mad with anger
 And talk yourself into exile. To me it matters little what you say
 about me, but rulers are sensitive.
 Time and again I've smoothed down Creon's indignation, then
 you like a madwoman, like a possessed imbecile,
 Wag your head and let the words flow again; you never cease
 From speaking evil against him and his family. So now—you've
 got it. Call yourself lucky, Medea,
 Not to get worse than exile. In spite of all this, I have your
 interest at heart and am here to help you.
 Exile's a bitter business; I want to make some provision for you.

I wish you no harm,
 Although you hate me.

(He waits for her to speak, but she is silent. He continues:)

And in particular the children; my sons;
 our sons. You might have been decent enough
 To have thought of our sons.

MEDEA *(slowly)*. Did you consider them
 When you betrayed this house?

JASON. Certainly I considered them.

It was my hope that they would grow up here,
 And I, having married power, could protect and favor them. And
 if perhaps, after many years, I become
 Dynast of Corinth—for that is Creon's desire, to make me his
 heir—our sons
 Would have been a king's sons. . . . I hope to help them,
 wherever they go; but now of course must look forward
 To youneer children.

MEDEA *(trembling)*. Ah . . . it's enough. Something might happen.

It is . . . likely that . . . something might happen
 To the bride and the marriage.

JASON. I'll guard against it. But evidently
 Creon is right to be rid of you.

MEDEA. Have you finished now? I thought I would let you speak
 on and spread out your shamelessness
 Before these women: the way a Tyrian trader unrolls his rare
 fabrics:⁸ "Do you like it, ladies?" It is the
 Dog's daughter's husband. It is a brave person: it has finally got
 up its courage—with a guard of spears—
 To come and look me in the face.

O Jason: how have you pulled
 me down

To this hell of vile thoughts? I did not used to talk like a common
 woman. I loved you once:

8. *the way a Tyrian* (tir' en) *trader unrolls his rare fabrics*, the people of Tyre (tir) in Phoenicia were the greatest merchants of the ancient world.

And I am ashamed of it: but there are some things
 That ought to be remembered by you and me. That blue day
 when we drove through the Hellespont
 Into Greek sea,⁹ and the great-shouldered heroes were singing at
 the oars, and those birds flying
 Through the blown foam: that day was too fine I suppose
 For Creon's daughter's man to remember—but you might
 remember
 Whether I cheated my father for you and tamed the fire-breathing
 Brazen-hoofed bulls; and whether I saved your life in the field of
 the teeth; and you might remember
 Whether I poisoned the great serpent and got you the Golden
 Fleece; and fled with you, and killed my brother
 When he pursued us, making myself abominable
 In my own home; and then in yours I got your enemy Pelias
 hacked to death
 By his own daughters' hands¹⁰—whatever these fine Corinthian
 friends of yours
 May say against my rapid and tricky wisdoms: you it has served,
 You it has served well: here are five times, if I counted right—
 and all's not counted—
 That your adventure would have been dusty death
 If I'd not saved you—but now you think that your adventures are
 over; you are safe and high placed in Corinth,
 And will need me no more.

It is a bit of a dog, isn't it, women? It

is well qualified
 To sleep with the dog's daughter. But for me, Jason, me driven
 by the hairy snouts from the quadruped marriage-bed,
 What refuge does your prudent kindness advise? Shall I fly home
 to Colchis—
 To put my neck in the coil of a knotted rope, for the crimes
 I served you with? Or shall I go and kneel to the daughters of
 Pelias? They would indeed be happy
 To lay their hands on my head: holding the very knives and the
 cleavers
 That carved their sire. The world is a little closed to me, ah?
 By the things I have done for you.
*(Meanwhile the NURSE has some forward on the stage, and
 stands this side of CHORUS, listening, wringing her hands.
 Now
 she speaks.)*

THE NURSE.

I'll go to the palace

And seek for Aegeus. There is no other hope.

(She hurries out in that direction.)

JASON (slowly).

I see, Medea,

You have been a very careful merchant of benefits. You forget

9. That blue day . . . into Greek sea,
 the day Medea and Jason, fleeing the
 wrath of her father and homelnd, went
 to Greece.

10. Whether I cheated . . .
his own daughters' hands. Medea
 recalls the magic she worked to help
 Jason win and keep the Golden Fleece.
 The tasks

then to use them to sow dragons' teeth
 into the ground, from which would spring
 a crop of armed men. Medea provided
 him with an ointment to protect him and a
 charm to help him subdue the bulls; she
 also showed him a trick to confuse the
 armed men and keep them from attacking
 him. The "great serpent"—that is, the
 dragon that guarded the Golden Fleece—
 Medea put to sleep with a magic potion.
 Having thus secured the Fleece, Jason
 returned with it to Iolcos (T órkas), his
 home city, and gave it to his Uncle Pelias
 as), who had usurped the throne of
 the city from Jason's father. When Pelias
 still refused to return the throne to Jason,
 Medea avenged the wrong by persuading
 Pelias's daughters that they could
 rejuvenate their father if they dismem-
 bered his body while he slept. They did as
 Medea told them, but Medea let him die.
 Then she and Jason fled to Corinth.

none, you keep a strict reckoning. But-
Some little things that I on my side have done for you
Ought to be in the books too: as, for example, that I carried you
Out of the dirt and superstition of Asiatic Colchis into the rational
Sunlight of Greece, and the marble music of the Greek temples: is
that no benefit? And I have brought you
To meet the first minds of our time, and to speak as an equal with
the great heroes and the rulers of cities:
Is that no benefit? And now—this grievous thing that you hate me
for:
That I have married Creon's young daughter, little Creusa:¹¹ do
you think I did it like a boy or a woman,
Out of blind passion? I did it to achieve power here; and I'd have
used that power to protect
You and our sons, but your jealous madness has muddled
everything. And finally:
As to those acts of service you so loudly boast—whom do I thank
for them? I thank divine Venus, ¹² the goddess
Who makes girls fall in love. You did them because you had to do
them; Venus compelled you; I
Enjoyed her favor. A man dares things, you know, he makes his
adventure
In the cold eye of death; and if the gods care for him
They appoint an instrument to save him; if not, he dies. You were
that instrument.

MEDEA. Here it is: the lowest,
The obscene dregs; the slime and the loathing; the muddy bottom
of a mouthed cup: when a scoundrel begins
To invoke the gods. You had better go, Jason. Vulgarly
Is a contagious disease; and in a moment what could I do but spit
at you like a peasant, or curse you
Like a drunken slave? You had better take yourself back to. . .

"Little Creüsa."

JASON. I came to help you and save you if possible.
MEDEA. Your
help

Is not wanted. Go. Go.

JASON. If I could see my boys . .

MEDEA. Go quickly.

JASON. Yours the regret then. *(Exit.)*

*(Watching him go, MEDEA strokes her wrist and hand to the tips of
the spread fingers, as if she were scraping off slime.)*

MEDEA. This is it. I did not surely know it. loathing is all. This
flesh

He has touched and fouled. These hands that wrought for him,
these knees



That ran his errands. This body that took his . . . what they call
love. and made children of it. If I could peel off
The flesh, the children. the memory . . .
*(Again She scarifies one hand with the other. She looks at her
hand.)*

Poor misused hand: poor

defiled arm: your bones
Are not unshapely. If I could tear off the flesh and be bones.
naked bones:
Salt-scoured bones .on the shore
At home in Colchis . . .
(She stands staring, thinking of home perhaps.)
FIRST CORINTHIAN WOMAN. God keep me from fire and the hunger

of the sword.
Save me from the hateful sea and the jagged lightning.
And the violence of love.

SECOND WOMAN. A little love is a joy in the house.
A little fire is a jewel against frost and darkness.

FIRST WOMAN. A great love is a fire
That burns the beams of the roof.
The doorposts are flame and the house falls.
A great love is a lion in the cattle-pen.
The herd goes mad. the heifers run bawling.
And the claws are in their flanks.
Too much love is an armed robber in the treasury:
He has killed the guards and he walks in blood.

SECOND WOMAN. And now I see the black end,
The end of great love, and God save me from it:
The unburied horror, the unbridled hatred,
The vultures tearing a corpse:
God keep me clean of those evil beaks.

THIRD WOMAN: What is she doing, that woman,
Staring like stone, staring?
Oh, she has moved now.

MEDEA. Annihilation. The word is pure music: annihilation. To
annihilate the past—

Is not possible: but its fruit in the present . . .
Can be nipped off. Am I to look in my sons' eyes
And see Jafon's forever? How could I endure the endless
defilement, those lives

That mix Jason and me? Better to be clean
Bones on the shore. Bones have no eyes at all; how could they
weep? White bones
On the Black Sea shore . . .

Oh, but that's far. Not yet. Corinth

must howl first.

(She stands meditating.)

FIRST WOMAN. The holy fountains flow up from the earth,
The smoke of sacrifice flows up from the earth,
The eagle and the wild swan fly up from the earth,
Righteousness also
Has flown up from the earth to the feet of God.
It is not here, but up there; peace and pity are departed;
Hatred is here; hatred is heavy, it clings to the earth.
Love blows away, hatred remains.

SECOND WOMAN. Women hate war, but men will wage it again.
Women may hate their husbands, and sons their fathers,
But women will never hate their own children.

FIRST WOMAN. But as for me; I will do good to my husband,
I will love my sons and daughters, and adore the gods.

MEDEA: If I should go into the house with a sharp knife
To the man and his bride . . .

Or if I could fire the room they sleep in, and hear them
Wake in the white of the fire, and cry to each other, and howl
like dogs,

And howl and die . . .

But I might fail; I might be cut down first;
The knife might turn in my hand, or the fire not burn, and my
enemies could laugh at me.

No: I have subtler means, and more deadly cruel; I have my dark
art

That fools call witchcraft. Not for nothing I have worshipped the

wild gray goddess that walks in the dark, the wise one,
The terrible one, the sweet hunters, flower of night, Hecate¹³
In my house at my hearth.

13. *Hecate* (hek'a ta'), the goddess of the underworld; associated with magic and witchcraft.

THE NURSE: (*has entered, and hurries toward MEDEA*). My lady: hewas leaving Creon's door: he is coming.
(*MEDEA pays no attention; the NURSE kneels, catches her hand.*)

Aegeus is coming!

The power of Athens.

MEDEA. I will not see him. Go back and tell him so.

(*The NURSE retreats behind CHORUS. MEDEA prays:*)

Ancient goddess to whom I and my people
Make the sacrifice of black lambs and black female hounds,
Holy one, haunter of crossroads, queen of night, Hecate,
Help me now: to remember in my mind the use of the
venomous fire, the magic song, r'.

And the sharp gems.

(*She sits on the steps in deep thought.*)

(*AEGEUS comes in, with ATTENDANTS. His servants are not armed; they have a look of travel and the sea.*)

FIRST CORINTHIAN WOMAN: He is here, Medea.

Athens is here

(*MEDEA pays no attention.*)

AEGEUS (*comes near to her*). Medea, rejoice! There is no fairer
greeting from friend to friend.

(*She ignores him. He speaks more loudly.*)

Hail and rejoice, Medea!

(*She lifts her head and stares at him.*)

MEDEA. "Rejoice?" it may be so. It may

be I shall ... rejoice

Before the sun sets.

AEGEUS. Medea! What has happened to you?

MEDEA.

Nothing.

AEGEUS. Your eyes are cavernous!

And your mouth twitches.

MEDEA. Nothing: I am quite well: fools trouble
me.—Where are you traveling from,

Aegeus?

AEGEUS. From Delphi, where I went to consult

The ancient oracle of Apollo.¹⁴

MEDEA (*abstractedly*) Oh . . . Delphi . . . Did you get a
good answer?

AEGEUS. A obscure one.

Some god or other hsade me unable to beget a child: that is
my trouble: but the oracle

Never gives plain responses. I tell you these things because
you

are skilled in mysteries, and you might help me

14. *Delphi* (derfi) . . . *oracle of Apollo*. Delphi is a city in Greece where a temple of Apollo, the god of truth, was located. An oracle is a place where prophecies, believed to be the words of a god, were spoken by priests or priestesses; Delphi was one of the most famous and trustworthy oracles.

To the god's meaning.

MEDEA (*wearily*). You want a child! What did Apollo
Say to you?

AEGEUS. That I must not unloose the hanging foot of the
wineskin until I return

To the hearth of my fathers.

MEDEA (*without interest*). The hanging foot of the wineskin.

You have never had a child?

AEGEUS. No.

And it is bitterness.

MEDEA. But when misfortune comes it is bitter to have
children, and watch their starlike

Faces grow dim to endure it.

AEGEUS. When death comes, Medea,

It is, for a childless man, utter despair. darkness, extinction.

One's children

Are the life after death.

MEDEA (*excited*). Do you feel it so? Do you feel it so?

Then—if you had a dog-eyed enemy and needed absolute
vengeance—you'd kill

The man's children first. Unchild him. ha?

And then unlife him.

AEGEUS. I do not care to think of such horrors.

I have no complete enemy.

(*He stares, and slightly recoils from her.*)

What is it? What is the matter,

Medea? You are trembling: wild fever

Flames in your eyes.

MEDEA. I am well enough. . . . Fools trouble me, and

dogs; but not that—Oh . . .

(*She collapses on the steps and weeps.*)

AEGEUS. What has happened to you?

THE NURSE (*crouches by her, trying to comfort her*). My dear ...

my love . . .

MEDEA: (*pushes her gently aside, looks up at AEGEUS*). I would not
hurt my children. Their father hurts them.

AEGEUS: What do you mean, Medea? Jason? What has Jason
done?

MEDEA: He has betrayed and denied

Both me and them.

AEGEUS: Jason has done that? Why? Why?

MEDEA: He has cast

me off and married Creon's young daughter.

And Creon, this very day, is driving us

Into black exile.

AEGEUS. Jason consents to that?

MEDEA.

He is glad of it.

AEGEUS.

Why—it's

atrocious, it's past belief.

THE NURSE (*says in MEDEA's ear*). Ask him for refuge! Ask him to receive you in Athens!

MEDEA (*stands up, straight and rigid*). Do you think such men ought to be punished, Aegeus?

AEGEUS. You mean you are driven out into exile?

MEDEA.

Into homeless

exile.

AEGEUS. Why that?

MEDEA.

Because our presence here is embarrassing

To the young bride—Do you not think such men ought to be punished, Aegeus?

AEGEUS.

I think it villainous

They told me nothing of this.

MEDEA.

Do you not think such men ought

to be punished, Aegeus?

AEGEUS.

. It's bad.

Where will you go?

MEDEA (*solemnly*). If there is any rightness on earth or in heaven, they will be punished.

AEGEUS.

Where

Will you go to, Medea?

MEDEA.

What? To death, of course.

THE NURSE:

Oh... She is

All bewildered, sir

...

In the deep storm and ocean of grief, or she would ask of you
Refuge in Athens.

MEDEA (*in bitter mockery, seeing AEGEUS hesitate*). Ah? So I

should. That startled the man.—Aegeus:

Will you shelter me in Athens?

AEGEUS.

Why . . . yes. Yes . . . I will not

take you from Corinth, it would not be right.

I want no trouble with Creon; I am his guest here. If you by your
own means come to Athens

I will take care of you.

MEDEA.

I could repay you for it. I know the

remedies that would make a dry stick

Flame into flower and fruit.

AEGEUS (*eagerly*).

You'd cure my sterility?

MEDEA.

I could do so.

AEGEUS. You are famous profound knowledge
Of drugs and charms.

(*Eagerly*)

You'll come to Athens?

MEDEA.

If I choose. If the

gods decide it so. But, Aegeus,
Would you protect me if I came? I have certain enemies. If
powerful enemies came, baying for my blood,
Would you protect me?

AEGEUS. Why . . . yes. What enemies? . . . Yes.

Athens protects.

MEDEA. I should need peace and a free
mind

While I prepared the medicines to make you well.

AEGEUS. You'll have
them, you'll have them, Medea. You've seen the huge stones In
the old sacred war-belt of Athens.' Come the four ends of the
world, they will not break in: you're safe there:

I am your pledge.

MEDEA. Will you swear it, Aegeus?

AEGEUS. Ah? Why? I
promised.

MEDEA. I trust you: the oath is formal: your cure
Depends on it. You swear by the fruitful earth and high shining
heaven that you will protect me in Athens
Against all men. Swear it.

AEGEUS. I swear by the fruitful earth and high
shining heaven to protect you in Athens

Against all men.

MEDEA. And if you should break this oath?

AEGEUS. I will not
break it.

MEDEA. If you should break it, the earth
Will give you no bread but death, and the sky no light
But darkness.

AEGEUS (*visibly perturbed*). I will not break it.

MEDEA. You must repeat the
words, Aegeus.

AEGEUS. If I break it, the earth
Will give me no bread but death, and the sky no light
But darkness.

MEDEA. You have sworn: the gods have heard you.

AEGEUS (*uneasily*). When
will you come to Athens?

MEDEA. To . . . Athens? Oh,
To Athens. Why—if I come, if I live—it will be soon. The
yoke's

On the necks of the horses.—I have some things to do
That men will talk of afterwards with hushed voices: while I
and

my children

Safe in Athens laugh. Is that it? Farewell, Aegeus.

(*She turns abruptly from Ilim; goes slowly, deep in
thought, into the house.*)

15. *the huge stones . . . of Athens*, the
stones in an ancient wall around the city,
used for protection.

AEGEUS (*staring after her*).

May the gods

comfort you. Medea.—To you also farewell,

Ladies of Corinth.

FIRST WOMAN.

Fair be the gale behind you, sir, and the way
ahead.

(*She turns to her companions.*)

What is she plotting in her deep mind?

She is juggling with death and life, as a juggler -

With a black ball and a white ball.

SECOND WOMAN. No: she is like some distracted city

Sharpening its weapons. Embassies visit her;

The heads of state come to her door;

She receives them darkly.

THE NURSE.

I beseech you, women,

Not to speak words against my lady whom I love. You know

what wicked injustice she has to suffer.

(*She prays.*)

O God, protector of exiles, lord of the holy sky, lead us

To the high rock that Athena loves, and the olive

Garland of Athens.¹⁶

FIRST WOMAN.

Athens is beautiful

As a lamp on a rock.

The temples are marble-shafted; light shines and lingers there,

Honey-color among the carved stones

And silver-color on the leaves of the olives.

The maidens are crowned with violets; Athens and Corinth

Are the two crowns of time.

SECOND WOMAN. Mycenae for spears and armor; Sparta

For the stern men and the tall blonde women; and Thebes I

remember,

Old Thebes and the seven gates in the gray walls—

But rather I praise Athena, the ivory, the golden,

The gray-eyed virgin, her city.

And also I praise Corinth of the beautiful fountains,'

On the fair plain between the two gulfs.

FIRST WOMAN. God-favored cities of the Greek world.

Fortunate those that dwell in them, happy that behold them.

SECOND WOMAN. How can one wish to die? How can that
woman

Be drowned in sorrow and bewildered with hatred?

(*She does not see MEDEA, who comes from the door and
stands*

between the pillars.)

For only to be alive and to see the light

Is beautiful. Only to see the light;

To see a blade of young grass,

Or the gray face of a stone.

FIRST WOMAN (*pointing toward MEDEA*). Hush.

16. the high rock . . . of Athens. The "high rock" is the Acropolis of Athens, the fortified high part of the city on which was • built a temple to the goddess Athena, protectress of cities and of Athens in particular. It was for Athens that Athena created the olive tree, thereafter considered sacred by its citizens.

17. Mycenae . . . the beautiful fountains. The various cities of Greece are invoked and characterized: Mycenae (mi WnG), known for its weapons; Sparta, for its warriors; Thebes, for its gates; Athens, for its patroness Athena, the "gray-eyed virgin"; and Corinth, for its fountains.

MEDEA (*proudly and falsely*).

As you say. What a

marvelous privilege it is

Merely to be alive. And how foolish it would be

To spend the one day of life that remains to me—at least in

Corinth—this tag end of one day

On tears and hatred! Rather I should rejoice, and sing, and give

gifts; and as to my enemies—

I will be reconciled with them. ‘

FIRST WOMAN (*amazed*).

Reconciled with them!

MEDEA.

As you say.

Reconciled. Why should they hate me?

Surely I can appease those people.

They say that gold will buy anything, even friendship, even love:

at least in Greece,

Among you civilized people, you reasonable and civilized

Hellenes.¹⁸ In fact,

We’ve seen it happen. They bought Jason; Jason’s love. Well . . .

18. *Hellenes* (hel’enz), Greeks.

I shall buy theirs.

I still have two or three of the treasures that I brought from

home, things of pure precious gold, which a god

Gave to the kings my ancestors.

(*The light darkens, a cloud passing over the sun.*)

Is it late? It seems to me

That the light darkens.

(*To the NURSE*) IS it evening?

THE NURSE (*trembling*).

No . . . No . . . A cloud.

MEDEA.

hope for thunder: let the sky rage: my gifts

Will shine the brighter.—Listen, old woman: I want you

To go to Jason and tell him . . . tell him . . . tell him that I am

sick of hating and weary of evil!

I wish for peace.

I wish to send precious gifts to that pale girl with the yellow hair

Whom he has married: tell him to come and take them—and to

kiss his boys

Before we go into exile. Tell him to come speedily. Now run, run,

find him.

THE NURSE. Oh, I’ll go. I’ll run.

(*Tremulously, to CHORUS*)

Let me pass, please.

(*MEDEA stands looking after her. The NURSE turns back at the limit of the scene, and says, wringing her hands:*)

But I am terrified. I do not know. . . . I am terrified. Pray to the

gods, women, to keep

Evil birds from our hearts!

(*She hurries away. MEDEA goes into the house.*)



Comment: The Greek Chorus

As you have learned, Greek drama evolved from the ritualistic performances of a chorus at the Dionysian festivals. After the actor Thespis the

stepped out of the chorus and began a dialogue with it, other characters soon followed suit, and the chorus's role gradually diminished in size (from fifty members to fifteen) and importance. Playwrights kept the chorus as a significant element in their dramas, but its functions were necessarily more limited.

Robinson Jeffers, who translated this version of important

Medea, has also retained the chorus, but has modified its nature slightly. Instead of having it speak in unison, he has assigned speeches to individual members. Nevertheless, the chorus still

plays a prominent part and fills the traditional functions of a chorus in Greek tragedy. situation

Many of these functions were merely technical. how

For instance, the chorus often announced the en-

trances and exits of characters or foreshadowed events in the action. It also recounted or interpreted past events for the purpose of clarifying

plot. These functions aided the movement of the story.

The chorus also had several well-defined dramatic functions. One was to sing and dance during the interludes between dialogues. Another, more significant function was to create or add to the emotional atmosphere of a play. One of the main ways it did this was to take on the

role of "ideal spectator." In this role, the chorus embodied the moral ideals of society and often admonished the characters against breaking these moral laws. In Act One, you saw how the

in the roles of the Corinthian women, carried out this function by commenting on Medea's

and behavior. As you read Act Two, observe

the chorus responds to Medea's further actions.

Act Two

MEDEA is sitting on one of the upper doorsteps. A cloak of woven gold lies across her knee and down the stone steps. Beside her are two opera cases of dark leather. From one she takes a coronet of golden yine leaves, looks at it, and replaces it.

Two SERVING-WOMEN stand in the doorway behind her. The NURSE stands below her, to one side of the steps. On the other side, at some distance, the CORINTHIAN WOMEN are huddled, like sheep in a storm.

The scene is darker than it was, and the gold cloth shines.

MEDEA. These are the gifts I am sending to the young bride: this golden wreath

And this woven-gold veil. They are not without value; there is nothing like them in the whole world, or at least The Western world; the god of the sun' gave them to my father's father, and I have kept them

In the deep chest for some high occasion: which has now come. I have great joy in giving these jewels to Creon's daughter, for the glory of life consists in being generous

To one's friends. and . . . merciless to one's enemies. . . . You know what a friend she has been to me. All Corinth knows.

The slaves talk of it. The old stones in the walls Have watched and laughed.

(MEDEA looks at the gold cloth, and strokes it cautiously with her hand. It seems to scorch her fingers. CHORUS has come nearer to look; now starts backward.)

MEDEA. See, it is almost alive. Gold is a living thing: such pure gold.

But when her body has warmed it, how it will shine!

(To the NURSE)

Why doesn't

he come? What keeps him?

THE NURSE (evidently terrified).. Oh, my lady: presently. I have but now returned from him. He was beyond the gate, watching the races—where a monstrous thing

Had happened: a young mare broke from the chariot And tore with her teeth a stallion.

(MEDEA stands up, shakes out the golden cloak, which again smolders. She folds it cautiously, lays it in the leather case. The light has darkened again; she looks anxiously at the clouded sun.)

MEDEA. He takes his time, ah? It is intolerable

To sit and wait.

(To the SERVING-WOMEN)



1. god of the sun, Helios (WIO os), an ancestor of Medea.

Take these into the house. Keep them at hand
For when I call.
(*They take them in. MEDEA moves restlessly, under extreme nervous tension* Speaks to the NURSE)

You say that a zmare attacked a stallion?

THE NURSE. She tore
him cruelly.

I saw him being led away: a black racer: his blood ran down
From the throat to the fetlocks.

MEDEA. You're sure he's coming? You're
sure?

THE NURSE. He said he would.

MEDEA. Let him make haste then!

SECOND CORINTHIAN WOMAN. Frightening irrational things
Have happened lately; the face of nature is flawed with omens.

FIRST WOMAN. Yesterday evening a slave

Came up to the harbor-gate, carrying a basket

Of new-caught fish: one of the fish took fire

And burned in the wet basket with a high flame: the thing was
witnessed

By many persons.

THIRD WOMAN. And a black leopard was seen

Gliding through the Marketplace. ...

MEDEA (*abruptly, approaching the WOMAN*). You haven't told me
yet: do you not think that Creon's daughter

Will be glad of those gifts?

FIRST WOMAN. O Medea, too much wealth

Is sometimes dreadful.

MEDEA. She'll be glad, however. She'll take them
and put them on, she'll wear them, she'll strut in them,

She'll peacock in them.—I see him coming now.—The whole

palace will admire her.—Stand away from me, women. While I
make my sick peace.

(*She goes across the scene to meet JASON, but more and more slowly, and stops. Her attitude indicates her aversion.*)

JASON (*entering*). Well. I have come. I tell you plainly,

Not for your sake: the children's. Your woman says that you

have your wits again, and are willing

To look beyond your own woes.

(*MEDEA is silent. JASON observes her and says.*)

It appears doubtful.

—Where are the boys? I have made inquiry: I can find fosterage
for them

In Epidaurus;² or any other of several cities

That are Creon's friends. I'll visit them from time to time, and
watch

²**fosterage** *Epidaurus*, that is, a foster home or place of refuge in Epidaurus (epí dor'ēs), a city to the southeast of Corinth and southwest of Athens

That they're well kept.

MEDEA (*with suppressed violence*). You mean . . . take them from me!

Be careful, Jason, I am not patient yet.

(*More quietly*) I am the one who labored
in pain to bear them, I cannot

Smile while I lose them. But I am learning; I am learning.—No,

Jason: I will not give up my little ones

To the cold care of strangers. It would be better for them to be
drowned in the sea than to live with those

Who do not love them, hard faces, harsh hands. It will be far
better for them to share

My wandering ocean of beggary and bleak exile: they'll still be
loved;

And when the sky rages I'll hold them warm

Against my heart. I love them, Jason. Only if you would keep
them and care for them here in Corinth,

I might consent.

JASON. Gladly—but they are exiled.

MEDEA. —In your own
house.

JASON. Gladly I'd do it—but you understand

They are exiled, as you are.

MEDEA. Innocent; for my rebellion. That's
black.

(*She reaches her hands toward him.*)

Forgive me, Jason,

As I do you. We have had too much wrath, and our acts
Are closing on us. On me I mean. Retribution is from the gods,
and it breaks our hearts: but you

Feel no guilt, you fear nothing, nothing can touch you. It is
wonderful to stand serene above fate

While earthlings wince. If it lasts. It does not always last.—

Do you love them. Jason?

JASON. Ha? Certainly. The children?

Certainly!

I am their father.

MEDEA. Oh, but that's not enough. If I am to give them
up to you—be patient with me.

I must question you first. And very deeply; to the quick. If
anything happened to them.

Would you be grieved?

JASON. Nothing will happen to them, Medea, if in
my care. Rest your mind on it.

MEDEA. You must pardon me: it is not possible to be certain of
that. If they were killed and their blood

Ran on the floor of the house or down the deep earth—
Would you be grieved?

JASON. You have a sick mind. What a weak thing
a woman is, always dreaming of evil.

MEDEA. Answer me!

JASON. Yes, after I'd cut their killer into red
collops³—I'd be grieved.

MEDEA. That is true: vengeance
Makes grief bearable. And knowing that . . . Creon's daughter,
your wife . . . no doubt will breed
Many other boys. But, if something should happen to . . . Creon's
daughter . . .

JASON. Enough, Medea. Too much.

Be silent!

MEDEA. I am to conclude that you love . . . Creon's daughter . . .
More than your sons. They'll have to take the sad journey with
me.

(*To the NURSE*)

Tell the boys to come out

And bid their father farewell.

(*The NURSE goes into the house.*)

JASON. I could take them from you

By force, Medea.

MEDEA (*violently*). Try it, you!

(*Controlling herself*) No, Creon decided otherwise: he
said they will share my exile.—Come, Jason,

Let's be friends at last! I know you love them. If they could stay here in
Corinth I'd be content.

JASON. I asked it,

And he refused it.

MEDEA. You asked him to take

My children from me!

(*The CHILDREN come out with their TUTOR, followed by the
NURSE.*)

I am quite patient now; I have learned.—

Come, boys: come,

Speak to your father.

(*They shrink back.*)

No, no, we're friends again. We're not angry

anymore.

(*JASON has gone eagerly to meet them on the steps. He drops to
one knee to be more nearly level with them, but they are shy and
reluctant.*)

JASON. Big boys. Tall fellows, ha?

You've grown up since I saw you.

MEDEA Smile for him children.

Give him your hand

3. conops, small pieces, as of meat.

*(She turns, and stands rigidly turned away, her
Face sharp with pain)*

THE NURSE (to JASON). I think he's afraid of your helmet, sir.

JASON (to the YOUNGER BOY).

What?

What? You'll learn, my man,

Not to fear helmets. The enemy will run from yours

When you grow up to size.

(To the ELDER BOY) And you, Captain.

How would you like a horn-tipped boy, to hunt rabbits with?

Wolves, I mean.

*(He plays with the CHILDREN. They are less shy of him
now.)*

FIRST CORINTHIAN WOMAN (coming close to MEDEA). Don't give
them to him,

Medea. If you do, it will ache, forever.

SECOND WOMAN.

You have refuge: take them

there.

Athens is beautiful. . .

MEDEA (fiercely). Be silent!

Look at him: he loves them—ah? Therefore his dear children

Are not going to that city but a darker city, where no games are
played, no music is heard. Do you think

I am a cow lowing after the calf? Or a bitch with pups, licking

The hand that struck her? Watch and see. Watch this man,

women: he is going to weep. I think

He is going to weep blood, and quite soon. and much more

Than I have wept. Watch and keep silence.

(She goes toward the group on the steps.) Jason.

Are the boys dear to you? I think I am satisfied that you love
them. . .

(She weeps, covering her face.)

Oh, Oh, Oh...

*(JASON stinds up and turns to her. one of the BOYS
clinging to each of his hands. He has made friends with
them.)*

JASON. These two young heroes . . . God's hand, Medea. what is
it?

What is the matter?

MEDEA (makes with both hands a gesture of pushing down
something, and flings her head back proudly). Nothing. It is
hard to let them go.

Are they vere sweet to you? You love them dearly?—This I have
thought of:

You shall take them to . . . Creon's daughter. your wife . . . and make
them kneel to her, and ask her

To ask her father to let them stay here in Corinth. He'll grant it. he is
growing old, he denies her nothing.

Even that hard king loves his only child.

What she asks is done. You will go with the boys, Jason, and speak
for them—they are not skillful yet

In supplication—and send gifts. I'll put gifts in their hands.

People say that gifts

Will persuade even the gods.—Is it well thought of?

Will she listen to us?

JASON. Why, if I ask it! She'd hardly refuse me
anything. And I believe that you're right,

She can rule Creon.

MEDEA (*to the NURSE*). Bring me those gold things.

(*To the CHILDREN*) Dear ones,

brave little falcons . . . little pawns of my agony . . .

Go ask that proud breastless girl of her bitter charity

Whether she will let you nest here until your wings fledge, while
far your mother

Flies the dark storm. . .

(*She weeps again.*)

JASON. I'm sorry for you. Parting is hard.

MEDEA. I can
bear it.

And worse too.

(*The NURSE and a SERVING-WOMAN bring the gifts.*)

Oh, here: here are the things: take them, darlings,

Into your little hands.

(*Giving them to the CHILDREN*)

Hold carefully by the cases: don't touch the

gold,

Or it might . . . tarnish.

JASON. Why! These are king's treasures. You
shouldn't. Medea: it's too much. Creon's house

Has gold enough of its own.

MEDEA. Oh—if she'll wear them. What should

I want

With woven golden vanities? Black is my wear. The woman ought
to be very happy

With such jewels—and such a husband—ah? Her sun is rising,

mine going down—I hope

To a red sunset.—The little gold wreath is pretty, isn't it?

JASON (*doubtfully*). It looks
like fire. . . .

MEDEA. Vine leaves: the fiashing

Arrow-sharp leaves. They have weizht, though.

(*She takes the cases from the CHILDREN, gives them to the NURSE
and the TUTOR.*) Gold is too heavy

a burden for little hands. Carry them, you,

Until you come to the palace.—Farewell. sweet boys: brave little

trudging pilgrims from the black wave
To the white desert: take the stuffEbe sure you lay it in her
own hands.

Come back and tell me what happens.

(She turns abruptly away from them.) Tell me what happens.

*(The CHILDREN go out reluctantly, JASON holding their hands.
The NURSE and the TUTOR have gone ahead. MEDEA hides
her face, weeping; then lifts her head proudly, and walks toward
CHORUS.)*

Rejoice, women. The gifts are given; the bait is laid.
The gods roll their great eyes over Creon's house and quietly
smile: for no rat nor cony
Would creep into the open undisguised traps
That take the proud race of man. They snap at a shiny bait;
they'll believe anything. I too
Have been fooled in my time: now I shall triumph. That robe of
bright-flowing gold, that bride-veil, that fish-net
To catch a young slender salmon—not mute, she'll sing: her
delicate body writhes in the meshes,
The golden wreath binds her bright head with light: she'll dance,
she'll sing loudly:
Would I were there to hear it, that proud one howling.—Look,
the sun's out again, the clouds are gone,
All's gay and clear. I wish the deep earth would open and
swallow us—

Before I do what comes next.

I wish all life would perish, and the holy gods in high heaven die,
before my little ones

Come home to my hands.

FIRST CORINTHIAN WOMAN. It would be better for you, Medea, if
the earth

Opened her jaws and took you down into darkness.

But one thing you will not do, for you cannot,

You will not hurt your own children, though wrath like
plague-boils

Aches, your mind in a fire-haze

Bites the purple apples of pain. No blood-lapping

Beast of the field, she-bear nor lioness,

Nor the lean wolf-bitch,

Hurts her own tender whelps; nor the yellow-eyed,

Scythe-beaked, and storm-shouldered

Eagle that tears the lambs has ever made prey

Of the fruit of her own tree—

MEDEA. How could that girl's death slake
me?

THIRD WOMAN *(coming forward from the others).* I am sick with
terror.

I'll run to the palace, I'll warn them.

MEDEA.

Will you?—Go. Go, if you

will.

God and my vengeful goddess⁴ are doing these things: you cannot prevent them, but you could easily fall

In the same fire.

THIRD WOMAN (*retreating*). I am afraid to go.

MEDEA.

You are wise.

Anyone

Running between me and my justice will reap
What no man wants.

FIRST WOMAN. Not justice: vengeance,

You have suffered evil; you wish to knflict

MEDEA. I do according to nature what I have to do.

FIRST WOMAN. I have heard evil

Answering evil as thunder answers the lightning,

A great waste voice in the hollow sky,

And all that they say is death. I have heard vengeance

Like an echo under a hill answering vengeance,

Great hollow voices: all that they say is death.

SECOND WOMAN.

The sword speaks

And the spear answers: the city is desolate.

The nations remember old wrongs and destroy each other,

And no man binds up their wounds.

FIRST WOMAN.

But justice

Builds a firm house.

MEDEA.

The doors of her house are vengeance.

SECOND WOMAN.

I dreamed that someone

Gave good for evil, and the world was amazed.

MEDEA. Only a coward or a madman gives good for evil.—Did
you hear a thin music

Like a girl screaming? Or did I perhaps imagine it? Hark, it is
music.

THIRD WOMAN. Let me go, Medea!

I'll be mute, speak to no one. I cannot bear—

Let me go to my house!

MEDEA.

You will stay here,

And watch the end.

(*The WOMEN are beginning to mili like scared çattle, huddled and circular.*)

You will be quiet. you women. You came to

see

How the barbarian woman endures betrayal: watch and you'll
know.

SECOND WOMAN. My heart is a shaken cup

4. *my vengeful goddess*, Hecate. Medea was a priestess of Hecate.

Of terror: the thin black wine
Spills over all my flesh down to my feet.
FIRST WOMAN. She fled from her father's house in a storm of
blood,

In a blood-storm she flew up from Thessaly,⁵
Now here and dark over Corinth she widens
Wings to hide up the twisted whirlwind
And talons to hold with-

Let me flee this dark place and the pillared doorway.
SECOND WOMAN. I hear the man-wolfion the snow hill

Howl to the soaring moon—;

THIRD WOMAN. The demon comes in through the locked door
And strangles the child-

SECOND WOMAN. Blood is the seed of blood, hundredfold the
harvest;

The gleaners that follow it, their feet are crimson—

FIRST WOMAN. I see the whirlwind hanging from the black sky
Like a twisted rope,

Like an erect serpent, its tail tears the earth,
It is braided of dust and lightning,

Who will fly in it? Let me hide myself
From these night-shoring pillars and the dark door.

MEDEA. Have patience,
women. Be quiet.

I am quite sure something has happened; presently someone
Will bring us news.

THIRD WOMAN. Look! The children are coming.

SECOND WOMAN. They have bright things in their hands: their
faces are clear and joyous: was all that fear
A dream, a dream?

*(The TUTOR enters with the CHILDREN. The ELDER CHILD
carries a decorated bow and arrows; the YOUNGER CHILD
has a doll, a brightly painted wooden warrior. MEDEA, gazing
at the CHILDREN, retreats slowly backward from them.)*

THE TUTOR. Rejoice, Medea, I bring good news. The
princess graciously

Received your presents and smiled: it is peace between you. She
has welcomed the little boys, they are safe from exile.

They'll be kept here. Their father is joyful.

MEDEA *(coldly, her hands clenched in the effort of self-control).*
Yes?

THE TUTOR. All Creon's house is well pleased. When we first went
in

The serving-women came and fondled the children: it was
rumored through all the household that you and Jason
Were at peace again: like word of a victory

5. In a blood-storm . . . Thessaly. Iolcos, home of Jason's Uncle Pelias, whom Medea caused his own daughters to kill, was in the eastern district of Greece known as Thessaly.

Running through a wide city, when people gather in the streets to
 be glad together; and we brought the boys
 Into the hall; we put those costly gifts in their hands; then Jason
 Led them before the princess. At first she looked angrily at them
 and turned away, but Jason
 "Don't be angry at your friierrds. You ought to love
 Those whom I love. Look what they've brought you, dear," and
 she looked and saw
 In the dark boxes the brilliant gold: she smiled then,
 And marveled at it. Afterward she caressed the children; she even
 said that this little one's
 Hair was like fine-spun gold. Then Jason gaye them these toys
 and we came away.

MEDEA. Yes.—If this
 Were all. If this were all, old man—
 I'd have your bony loins beaten to a blood-froth
 For the good news you bring.

THE TUTOR. My lady—!

MEDEA. There's more, however.
 It will soon come.

*(She moves restlessly in the direction they have ,come
 from; stands gazing; returns toward the doorsteps. The
 CHILDREN shyly approach her and show their toys. She.
 with violent seff-constraint, looks at them; but folds,her
 hands in her cloak, not to touch them.)*

THE ELDER CHILD (drawing the little bow). Look, Mother.

MEDEA (suddenly weeping). Take
 them away from me!

I cannot bear. I cannot bear.
(She sits on the steps, and draws the cloak over her face.)

THE TUTOR. Children. come quickly.
*(He shepherds them up the steps and disappears in the house;
 but they turn back and stand in the doorway.)*

FIRST WOMAN. If there is any mercy or forbearance in heaven
 Let it reach down and touch that dark mind

To save it from what it dreams—
*(A young SLAVE dashes in, panting and distraught.He has run
 from CREON's house.)*

THE SLAVE. Where is Medea?

SECOND WOMAN. What has
 happened? What horror drives you?

Are spears hunting behind you?
THE SLAVE *(he sees MEDEA, still sitting on the steps, her face
 and head hiddet?).* Flee for your life. Medea! I am

Jason's man, but you were good to me
 While I was here in the house. Can you hear;me? Escape, Medea!

6. *slava . . . panting and distraught.* The
 slave, and later the nurse, will ,provide the
 details of the horrifying events at Creon's
 house. Violence was usually not shown
 directly on the Greek stage.

MEDEA (*slowly, drawing the cloak slowly from her head, and still sitting*). I hear you. Draw breath; say quietly
What you have seen. It must have been something notable, the
way your eyes
Bulge in the whites.

THE SLAVE. If you have horses, Medea, drive! Or a boat
on the shore,
Sail!

MEDEA. But first you must tell me about that beautiful girl who
was lately married: your great man's daughter:
Are they all quite well?

THE SLAVE. My ears ring with the crying, my eyes are
scalded. She put on the gold garments—
Did you do it, Medea?

MEDEA. I did it. Speak quietly.

THE SLAVE. You are avenged.
You are horribly avenged. It is too much.
The gods will hate you.

MEDEA (*avid, but still sitting*). That is my care. Did anyone die
with her?

THE SLAVE. Creon!

MEDEA (*solemnly, standing up*). Where is pride now?
Tell me all that you saw. Speak slowly.

THE SLAVE. He tried to save her—he
died! Corinth is masterless.
All's in amazed confusion, and some are looting, but they'll
avenge him—

(*He hears someone coming behind him.*)

I'm going on!
Someone is going to die.

(*He runs to the far side of the scene, and exits while MEDEA speaks. Meanwhile the light has been changing, and soon the sun will set.*)

MEDEA. Here comes a more stable witness.
(*The NURSE enters.*)

O1d

friend:
Catch your breath; take your time. I want the whole tale, every
gesture and cry. I have labored for this.

THE NURSE. Death is turned loose! I've hobbled and run, and
fallen—

MEDEA. Please, Nurse: I am very happy: go slowly.
Tell me these things in order from the beginning.
As when you used to dress me, when I was little, in my father's
house: you used to say
"One thing at a time; one thing and then the next."



("The light has changed to o flare of sunset.")

THE NURSE.

My eyes are
 blistered,
 My throats like a dry straw. . . . There was a long mirror on the
 wall, and when her eye saw it—
 After the children had played with Jason—she put her hands in the
 cases and took those good things—and I
 Watched, for I feared something might happen to her, but I never
 thought

So horribly—she placed on her little head the bright golden
wreath, she gathered the flowing gold robe
Around her white shoulders.
And slender flanks,
And gazed at the golden girl in the metal mirror, going back
and forth
On tiptoe almost: and swung her leg from the hip, to see the
flexible gold
Molding the thigh. But suddenly horror began. I . . . Oh.. Oh .
MEDEA. You are not suffering.
You saw it, you did not feel it. Speak plainly.

THE NURSE Her face went
white;
She staggered a few steps, bending over, and fell
Into the great throne-chair; then a serving-woman
Began to call for water thinking she had fainted, but saw the foam
Start on her lips, and the eyes rolling, and screamed instead.
Then some of them
Ran after Jason, others ran to fetch Creon: and that doomed girl
Frightfully crying started up from the chair: she ran, she was like
a torch, and the gold crown
Like a comet streamed fire: she tore at it but it clung to her head;
the golden cloak
Was white-hot, flaying the flesh from the living bones; blood
mixed with fire ran down. she fell, she burned
On the floor, writhing. Then Creon came and flung himself on
her, hoping to choke
That rage of flame. but it ran through him, his own agony
Made him forget his daughter's. The fire stuck to the flesh, it
glued him to her; he tried to stand up,
He tore her body and his own. The burned flesh broke
In lumps from the bones.

(She covers her eyes with her hands.)

I have finished. They lie there.
Eyeless. disfigured, untouchable: middens⁷ of smoking flesh laced
with molten gold...

(Nearly a scream) No! I have finished.
I have no more.

MEDEA. I want all.
Had they died when you came away?

THE NURSE. I am not able . . . have
mercy. . . . No. the harsh tides of breath
Still whistled in the black mouths. No one could touch them.
Jason stood in their smoke and his hands tore
His unhelmeted hair.

7. *middens*, pieces of garbage or refuse.

MEDEA.

You have told good news well: reward
you.

As for those people, they will soon die. Their woes are over too
soon. Mine are not.
Jason's are not.

*(She turns abruptly from her, toward the CHILDREN who have
been standing by the doorway, fascinated, not comprehending but
watching.)*

My little falcons! Listen to me: laugh and be glad:
we have accomplished it.

Our enemies were great and powerful, they were full of cold
pride, they ruled all this country—they are down in the ashes,
Crying like dogs, cowering in the ashes, in their own ashes. They
went down with the sun, and the sun will rise
And not see them again. He will think, "Perhaps they are
sleeping, they feasted late.

At noon they will walk in the garden. Oh, no, oh, no!
They will not walk in the garden. No one has ever injured me but
suffered more
Than I had suffered.

(She turns from the CHILDREN.)

Therefore this final sacrifice I intended glares

in my eyes

Like a lion on a ridge.

(Turning back to the CHILDREN)

We still hate, you know: a person nearer
than these, more vile, more contemptible,
Whom I . . . I cannot. If he were my own hands I would cut him
off, or my eyes, I would gouge him out—
But not you: that was madness.

(She turns from them.)

So Jason will be able to say, "I

have lost much,

But not all: I have children: my sons are well, That too is
unbearable.

(She stands staring, agonized, one hand picking at the other.)

I want him crushed. boneless. crawling. . . .

I have no choice.

(Resolutely, to CHORUS)

You there! You thought me soft and submissive

like a common woman—who takes a blow

And cries a little. and she wipes her face

And runs about the housework. loving her master? I am not such
a woman.

FIRST WOMAN. Awake. Medea!

Awake from the evil dream. Catch up your children and flee

Farther than Athens, farther than Thrace⁸ or Spain, flee to the world's end.

Fire and death have done your bidding.
Are you not fed full with evil?

Is it not enough?

MEDEA. No. Loathing is endless.
Hate is a bottomless cup. I will pour and pour.

(She turns fiercely to the children)

Children—

(Suddenly melting)

O my

little ones!

What was I dreaming?—My babes, my own!

(She kneels to them, taking their hands.)

Never, never, never,

never

Shall my own babes be hurt. Not if every war-hound and
spear-slave in headless Corinth

Were on the track.

(Still kneeling, to CHORUS)

Look, their sweet lips are trembling: look,
women, the little mouths: I frightened them
With those wild words: they stood and faced me, they never
flinched.

Look at their proud young eyes! My eaglets, my golden ones!

(She kisses them, then holds them off and gazes at them.)

O sweet small faces . . . like the wild roses

The bloom where the cliff breaks toward the brilliant sea: the
delicate form and color, the dear, dear fragrance
Of your sweet breath . . .

(She continues gazing at them; her face changes.)

THE NURSE. My lady, make haste, haste!

Take them and flee. Flee away from here! Someone will come
soon.

- *(MEDEA still gazes at the CHILDREN. The NURSE clutches her shoulder.)*

Oh—listen to me.

Spears will come, death will come. All Corinth is in confusion and
headless anarchy, unkinged and amazed

Around that horror you made: therefore they biter: yet in a
moment

Its avengers come!

*(MEDEA looks up from staring at the CHILDREN. Her face has
changed; the love has gone out of it. She speaks in a colorless
tired voice.)*

MEDEA.

I have a sword in the house.

I can defend you.

*(She stands up sign and takes the CHILDREN by their
shoulders;*

8. Thrace, once a country to the northeast of Greece; now part of Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey.

holds the ELDER BOY in front of her, toward CHORUS; speaks with cold intensity.)

Would you say that this child
Has Jason's eyes?

(The WOMEN are silent, in terror gazing at her.)

. . . They are his cubs. They have his blood.

As long as they live I shall be mixed with him.

(She looks down at the CHILDREN, speaks tenderly but hopelessly.)

Children:

It is evening. See, evening has come. Come, little ones,

Into the house. Evening brings all things home. It brings the bird
to the bough and the lamb to the fold—

And the child to the mother. We must not think too much: people
go mad

If they think too much.

(She has pushed the CHILDREN gently into the house. In the doorway, behind them, she flings up her hands as if to tear her hair out by the roots; then quietly goes in. The great door closes; the iron noise of the bolt is driven home.)

THE NURSE

No! No!

(She rushes toward the door, but sinks down on the steps, helpless, her hand reaching up and beating feebly against the foot of the door.)

No . . .

FIRST WOMAN. What has happened?

SECOND WOMAN. That crown of horrors . . .

(They speak like somnambulists, and stand frozen. There is a moment of silence.)

CHILD'S VOICE *(in the house, shrill, broken off).* Mother! Ai—!

(The WOMEN press toward the door, crying more or less simultaneously.)

THE WOMEN. Medea, no!

Prevent her! Save them!

Open the door—

(They listen for an answer.)

ELDER CHILD'S VOICE. You've hurt him! The blood. The blood.

Oh, Mother!

THIRD WOMAN *(below the steps, farthest from the door).* A god is
here, Medea, he calls to you, he forbids you—

(The NURSE has risen, and beats feebly on the door, stooping and bent over. FIST WOMAN stands beside her very erect, with her back against the door, covering her ears with her hands. They are silent.)

ELDER CHILD'S VOICE *(clear, but as if hypnotized).* She is hunting
me. . . .

She is hunting me. . . . She is hunting. . . . Aah!

(Lamentation—keening—is heard in the house. It rises and falls, and continues to the end, but often nearly inaudible. It is now twilight.)

THE NURSE *(limps down the steps and says)*. There is no hope in heaven or earth. It is done.

It was destined when she was born, now it is done.

(Wailing)

Oh, Oh, Oh.

THIRD WOMAN *(with terror, looking into the shadows)*. Who is coming?

Someone is running at us!

FIRST WOMAN *(quietly)*. The accursed man.

Jason.

SECOND WOMAN. He has a sword!

FIRST WOMAN.

I am more afraid of the clinging

contagion of his misfortunes.

A man the gods are destroying.

JASON *(enters rapidly, disheveled and shaking, a drawn sword in his hand)*.

Where is that murderess? Here in the house?

Or has she fled? She'll have to hide in the heavy metal darkness and caves of the earth—and there

I'll crawl and find her.

(No answer. The WOMEN draw away from him as he moves toward the door. He stops and turns on them, drawing his left hand across his face, as if his eyes were bewildered.)

Are you struck dumb? Are you shielding

her?

Where is Medea?

FIRST WOMAN. You caused these things. She was faithful to you and you broke faith.

Horror is here

JASON.

Uncaused. There was no reason. . . . Tell me at least

Whether she took my boys with her? Creon's people would kill them for what she has done: I'd rather save them

Than punish her. Help me in this.

THE NURSE *(wailing)*.

Oh, Oh, Oh . . .

JASON *(looking sharply at the NURSE)*.

So she has

killed herself.

Good. She never lacked courage. . . . I'll take my sons away to the far end of the earth. and never

Speak of these things again.

THE NURSE *(wailing)*.

Oh, Oh, Oh . . .

(Lamentation from the house answers.)

JASON *(with a queer slyness, for he is trying to cheat himself out*

9. **keening**, loud, sorrowful wailing for the dead.

*of believing what he dreads. He glances at the door, furtively,
over his shoulder.* Is she lying in there?

Honorable at least in her
Death. I'll might have known
it.

(They remain silent.)
answer!

Well,

FIRST WOMAN *(pointing toward CREON'S house).* Death is there;
death is here.

But you are both blind and deaf: how can I tell you?

JASON *(is silent, then says slowly)* — But . . . the
. . . children are well?

FIRST WOMAN. I do not know
Whether Medea lives or is dead.

JASON *(stares at her; turns suddenly to the door and hammers
on it with his sword-hilt).* Open! Open! Open!

*(He flings down the sword and sets his shoulder against the
door;*

*Pushes in vain; returns halfway down the steps, and says
pitiably)*

Womaen, I am alone. Help me.

Help me to break the bolt.

SECOND WOMAN. Our shoulders?

JASON. Go and find help. . . .

*(The door opens behind him. It is now fairly dark; the interior of
the house is lighted. Two SERVING-WOMEN come from behind the
door-jambs, and place two flickering lamps just outside the door,
at the bases of the pillars, and withdraw themselves. They move
symmetrically, like mirror-images of each other, one right-
handed, one left-handed. CHORUS draws back in fear; JASON
stands on the steps, bewildered. MEDEA comes into the doorway;
her hand and clothing are bloodmarked.)*

MEDEA. What feeble night bird overcome by misfortunes beats at
my door? Can this be that great adventurer,
The famous lord of the seas and delight of women, the heir of rich
Corinth---this crying drunkard
On the dark doorstep? Yet you've not had enough. You have
come to drink the last bitter drops.

I'll pour, them for you.

JASON. What's that stain on your hand?

MEDEA. The wine I
was pouring for you spilled on my hand.

Dear were the little grapes that were crushed to make it: dear
were the vineyards.

JASON. I came to kill you. Medea,
Like a caught beast, like a crawling viper. Give me my sons, that
I mav save them from Creon's men,
I'll go quietly away.

MEDEA. Hush, they are sleeping. Perhaps I will let
you look at them: you cannot have them.
But the hour is late, you ought to go home to that high-born
bride; the night has fallen, surely she longs for you.
Surely her flesh is not crusted black, nor her mouth a horror.
(*JASON kneels on the steps, painfully groping for his sword.*)

She

is very young,
But surely she will be fruitful.—Your sword you want?
There it is. Not that step, the next lower. No, the next higher.
JASON (*finds it and stands erect*). I'll kill you first and then find
my sons.

MEDEA. You must be careful, Jason. Do you see the two
fire-snakes
That guard this door?
(*Indicating the two lamps*)

Here and here: one on each side: two
serpents. Their throats are swollen with poison,
Their eyes are burning coals, and their tongues are fire. They are
coiled ready to strike: if you come near them,
They'll make you what Creon is. But stand there very quietly,
I'll let you
Look at your sons.

(*She speaks to someone in the house, behind the left door-jamb.*)

Bring them across the doorway that he may

see them.

(*She stands back, and two SERVING-WOMEN pass within the
doorway from left to right, bearing the slain CHILDREN on a litter
between them. It stands a moment in the gape of the door, and
passes.*)

JASON (*dropping the sword, flinging his hands to his temples*). I
knew it already.

I knew it before I saw it. No wild beast could have done it.

MEDEA. I have
done it: because I loathed you more
Than I loved them. Mine is the triumph.

JASON. Your triumph. No
iron-fleshed demon of those whom your father worships
In that blood-crusted temple—did you feel nothing no pity; are
you pure evil? I should have killed you

The day I saw you. •

MEDEA. I tore my own heart and laughed: I was
tearing yours.

JASON Will you laugh while I strangle you?

MEDEA. I would still laugh.—Beware my door-holders, Jason!
these eager serpents.—I'd still be joyful

To know that every bone of your life is broken; you are left
hopeless, friendless, mateless, childless,
Avoided by gods and men, unclean with awful excess of grief—
childless—

JASON (*exhausted*). It is no matter now

Who lives, or who dies.

MEDEA. Go down to your ship *Argo* and weep

beside it, that rotting hulk on the harbor-beach

Drawn dry astrand, never to be launched again—even the weeds

and barnacles on the warped keel

Are dead and stink—that's your last companion-

And only hope: for sometime one of the rotting timbers

Will fail on your head and kill you¹⁰—meanwhile sit there and

mourn, remembering the infinite evil, and the good

That has turned evil.

JASON. Exult in evil, gloat your fill, have your glory.

MEDEA. My heart's blood bought it.

JASON. Enjoy it then.

Only give me my boys: the little pitiful violated bodies: that I may

bury them

In some kind place.

MEDEA. To you? You would betray even the little

bodies: coin them for silver,

Sell them for power. No.

JASON (*kneeling*). Let me touch their dear flesh, let me

touch their hair!

MEDEA. No. They are mine.

They are going with me: the chariot is in the gate. You had love

and betrayed it: now of all men

You are utterly the most miserable. As I of women. But I, a

woman, a foreigner, alone

Against you and the might of Corinth—have met you throat for

throat, evil for evil. Now I go forth

Under the cold eyes of the weakness-despising stars:—not me

they soon.

(She goes out of sight behind the right door-jamb, following the dead CHILDREN. JASON stumbles up the steps to follow her, and falls between the two flickering lamps. The door remains open, the light in the house is partially extinguished. A music of mixed triumph and lamentation is heard to pass from the house, and diminish into the distance beyond it.)

10. one of the rotting timbers kill you, a prophecy about Jason's death that later came true.



Please go to the last page.....

Discussion

1. Act Two As Medea sits waiting for Jason at the open-ing of the act, the chorus describes omens that have been appearing in Corinth. (a) What are the omens? (b) Do they appear to suggest specific events of the play? Discuss.

2. When Jason enters, Medea tells him she for-gives him and then questions him closely on his feelings for his sons. If they were killed, she asks, would he be grieved? (a) What is Jason's reaction to Medea's question? (b) What do you think is Medea's purpose in questioning Jason in this way? (c) Does Medea ever actually intend to leave their sons with him? Explain.

3. How does Euripides introduce suspense in the scene in which Medea sends the children off to the royal palace with their father?

4. When the tutor reports the success of the children at the palace, Medea replies: "If this were all, old man—I'd have your bony loins beaten to a blood-froth for the good news you bring." Why does she respond in this way?

5. (a) Who is the first to bring Medea the news she wishes to hear? (b) How does she respond to the warnings this messenger gives her? (c) When her old nurse returns, what do Medea's responses to the detailed account she hears reveal about her character?

6. After hearing the consequences of her plot, Medea turns to her children and briefly appears to have lost her resolve to harm them. Then sud-denly she changes her mind. What causes her to change from a loving mother back into an aveng-ing wif e?

7. As Medea departs, leaving Jason "the most miserable" of men, she says: "Now I go forth un-der the cold eyes of the weakness-despising stars:—not me they scom." Explain how this final remark fits Medea's character.

2. Why do you think this subject is alluded to as often as it is?

Composition

The women of Corinth accuse Medea of want-ing "not justice: vengeance." As a native of nei-ther Corinth nor Colchis, you may have your own view about her motives. Be sure you understand the distinction between the two feelings; then review Medea's actions and focus on any state-ments she makes about what she does. Also con-sider the offenseS she thinks Jason has commit-ted and notice how others react to them. Then decide whether you agree with the Corinthian women's opinion.

Write a three- or four-paragraph essay stating and defendina your opinion, citing specific lines or incidents from the play as evidence. (See "Evalu-ating Your Evidence," page 662, in the Composi-tion

Application

Allusion

The allusions you encounter in literature text-books should generally cause you no problems, for most of them are explained in footnotes or sidenotes. Nevertheless, there are times when it is interesting to speculate on what an author's purpose in using certain allusions might be.

1. Review the sidenotes involving allusiohs that accompany this play. What, in general, is the sub-ject they most often deal with?

